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School officials in Lincoln, Nebraska, explain how data processing helps them save time and money--and provide better meals.

By Linda Feldman

"The bottom line is that we're serving higher quality meals," says Dr. Robert Den Hartog, associate superintendent for business affairs for Lincoln, Nebraska public schools. Almost 10 years ago, Dr. Den Hartog and food service director Helen Carlson initiated a data processing system for school food service operations. Today, that system keeps close tabs on the entire cycle of food purchasing, distribution, and serving for all of Lincoln's 46 schools, including 4 high schools.

"Dr. Den Hartog has always been a real school lunch supporter," said Ms. Carlson, adding that Dr. Den Hartog is currently a member of the National Advisory Council on Child Nutrition.

"He also has an enthusiasm for computers, and he saw a way to use them to develop a workable, organized system to improve food service and its image."

Dr. Den Hartog decided to implement a data processing system for several reasons: operating costs, greater demands for accountability, and a need for more accurate data for program management. "What this really means is better service and meals for our kids. And savings in time, money, and error minimization have more than offset our initial costs," he said proudly.

"Programming the system began slowly," explained Ms. Carlson, who has run the system's day-to-day operation for 9 years. "I knew nothing about computers when I started, but I had worked as a consultant to food service for 2 years, and then came on full time—about the same time that Dr. Den Hartog came on board. I knew food service and I knew what information would be useful."

Ms. Carlson, a dietitian, said that she and Dr. Den Hartog worked with the school district's data processing center to set up the program. The district owns the computer, so computer time is not assessed to school food service operations.

Dr. Den Hartog designed, and Ms. Carlson implemented, the data processing system to maintain data on receiving, ordering, delivering, financial and census reporting, and inventory. "The computer saves us an amazing amount of time," continued Ms. Carlson. "We are able to calculate and recall data we didn't have time for, previously. We used to need two secretaries working full-time and one working part-time to record this information manually. We have been able to cut our support staff to one secretary, thanks to the system."

In abbreviated terms, the system works like this:

Receiving and pricing

The school district maintains central food stores which stock the school food service for all Lincoln schools. At each location, a foreman fills out a prepared form whenever vendors deliver food. This form goes through the district's purchasing department to the data processing center, where the information is keypunched.

"Our data processing personnel are top-notch," Ms. Carlson commented. "I don't think we have two key-punch errors in a year." When the key-punching is completed, the computer prints out valuable information on the food shipment. The receipt report shows the number of units of each item on hand prior to the shipment, the additional units received, and the current inventory.

Ms. Carlson determines in what units each food will be sold to the schools, and all accounting for items is handled in these units. For instance, 1 unit of butter equals a case containing 32, 1-pound blocks, but 1 unit of spaghetti equals 1, 20-pound box.

In addition to showing the number of units, the printout also lists the "moving cost" of each item. Dr. Den Hartog explains the value of this "moving cost": "We decided to use a floating price on each item to reflect its average cost, based on changing prices and commodities received free from the Government. The moving cost changes with each new shipment. This way we have no problems favoring some schools with Government commodities."

Ordering and delivering

The next step in the process is ordering and delivering food to each school. Food orders are taken and delivered every 5 days. Ms. Carlson sends an automatically printed order form to each school food service manager. The order form includes "director's messages," which relate to menu planning as well as to detailing new or out-of-stock items. A typical message may read, "Hamburger patties, Government, are 30 pounds, 160 count." This tells food service managers that a Government

commodities shipment of hamburger patties is available in 30-pound boxes, 160 patties per box. Back orders are recorded and maintained in the system, and filled as soon as possible.

Keeping inventory

Inventory of central food stores is reported weekly and contains year-to-date usage, on-hand supplies, and value information. Individual schools maintain an inventory for their stores and freezers on a monthly basis. A reorder summary reports weekly what purchased items are at a designated low level of stock, for reordering purposes.

Financial and census reporting:

According to Dr. Den Hartog, "The key to the reporting side of our food service operations is a single document which we use as a deposit slip and record of meal service and labor expense."

Every day armored car service delivers money and deposit slips from each school to the bank. The bank uses these as deposit slips, and forwards copies of the slips through the school district's accounting department to data processing. Daily census data of meals served are then tallied by type and category, and so are the special milk and cash sale records. These computerized records provide the school food service with data for a monthly financial report. This report tells them current and year-to-date cash receipts, supplies, services, labor costs, number of meals, and operational profit or loss data for each school's program.

"We are also able to calculate our labor time (in total and broken down for each school) by cost, number of meals per hour, and total hours worked," Ms. Carlson

explained. "This is an excellent management tool, both in terms of our scheduling and hiring, and in terms of setting goals for the food service workers."

Standardizing operations

"We found that by standardizing all of our operations—from book-keeping to menus, there isn't a problem we can't solve," Ms. Carlson observes. The school district has a standard menu each day for elementary and for secondary schools. "This way, the number of items on our inventory are closely controlled," she continued. "For instance, we don't carry a variety of pickles—we carry only two kinds. This way, we save money and guarantee quality."

The school food service keeps control over nonfood items, as well. "Standardized recipes need standardized equipment," said Ms. Carlson. The school lunch director has developed a catalog which shows what equipment managers can buy and a print-out which lists items that are actually available. All inventory, orders, and bids are mechanically processed by the computer.

Checks and balances

Dr. Den Hartog sees real savings in his system. "I'll admit the system isn't perfect," he is quick to add, "but it's worked so well we really haven't changed the program in 5 or 6 years. It's a system that's nearly foolproof in terms of theft. There are so many checks and balances that book juggling or simple errors are easily caught. When there are problems with figures, the system is such that the computer shows exactly where the error occurred."

What's ahead

Last year, the school district bought a new computer with

terminal capabilities. The district uses the computer not only for school food service, but also for all purchasing, payroll, personnel records, grading, and employee insurance. In addition, the computer serves as a teaching tool and even processes payrolls for other school districts in the State on a contract basis.

Dr. Den Hartog hopes to see computer terminals at each school so that all data on the deposit slip for cash sales and census data can be keyed directly into the computer. He hopes some day to incorporate into the program more full-cost data, as well as added participation information. Also, he'd like to set up each central food store with a terminal for direct ordering and inventory.

System gets results

Ms. Carlson says her "number one priority" is the children she serves. She and Dr. Den Hartog are proud to say their system is simple, complete, and accurate enough so Lincoln children can continue to receive the same quality service, even when there are changes in personnel. Says Ms. Carlson, "All the information is here. Someone can review our materials closely and can understand our entire food service process in ordering and planning."

The Lincoln public school food service maintains a data processing system which works as a fine management tool in planning, controlling, measuring, and reporting its many facets because it saves time and money. More important, though, it works because it benefits the children who eat the 17,000 meals the food service provides each day.

The bottom line: The kids say the meals taste good. ☆

Lunch and learning

How can you convince students--and teachers--that it's important to learn about nutrition? These school food service people have come up with imaginative ideas.

By Melanie Watts and Linda Klein

South Dakota's school food service staff worked with teachers to put together a 20-lesson workbook. Pilot-tested last year, it's being distributed Statewide this year.

You can't teach an old dog new tricks, but what about an elephant?

South Dakota second graders have an answer to that question, based on their studies this past semester of a comical female pachyderm. "Foodella" takes some good advice from a knowledgeable friend and trades in a lifetime of bad eating habits for good ones.

The story of Foodella's transformation is described in a new workbook prepared especially to enlighten South Dakota second graders on the subject of good nutrition.

The workbook was tested in 52 classrooms in 17 different schools across the State last year, eventually reaching some 1200 students. And the response—from teachers, students, and adminis-

trators—has been unanimously in favor of making the workbook a permanent part of the second grade curriculum.

Designed for second graders

Lois Hoffman, dietitian for the school food services section, Department of Education and Cultural Affairs, came up with the workbook idea after discovering that little was being done to teach nutrition education to students at any grade level.

"Teachers had to develop their own material," explains Ms. Hoffman, who regularly travels the State checking on school lunch programs. "Or they had to rely on what little was included in the science books."

Ms. Hoffman felt a workbook would nicely fill this void. With permission from State school lunch director Martin Sorensen, she proceeded to put together some ideas she felt second graders should know: What makes up the basic four food groups, What makes a good snack, Why breakfast is important.

This is where the project stood summer before last, when six second grade teachers and an art

teacher spent a week with her at the State office putting these ideas into language the targeted age group would understand.

"We originally wanted first graders to use the workbook," recalls Ms. Hoffman, "but realized their limited reading and writing skills would present too many problems for them."

Ideas repeated twice

The volunteer teachers suggested that for the best possible retention, each idea should be repeated twice and that no lesson should last longer than 20 minutes.

There are 20 lesson plans in all and each is built around an activity that second graders enjoy—like coloring, unscrambling words, and finishing stories.

Every teacher who used the workbook wants to use it again. "This is a little surprising," smiles Ms. Hoffman, "since a few of them balked at using it at first."

In setting up the test last January, Ms. Hoffman selected schools whose principals had expressed an interest in nutrition education. All of the principals felt nutrition education should be part of the educational process, and might also help reduce the amount of food youngsters were throwing away every day in the cafeteria.

But some teachers saw the workbook as just one more addition to an already heavy teaching load. That is, until they got into it.

"Most of the teachers spent more than 20 days on the workbook," says Ms. Hoffman, "by adding some ideas of their own."

Looking at school lunches

One natural addition was the school's lunch program, which by national standards must serve meals which include foods from the basic four food groups. Students in one class took turns analyzing the day's lunch menu, putting each item into one of the food groups.

"Some of the combination dishes—like pizza and chili—would sometimes throw them," relates Ms. Hoffman, "but they could usually figure them out."

Another teacher used the lunch program as an opportunity for

stressing the importance of trying new foods. She held a class discussion following lunch and asked students to report on what new things they tried.

"Okay," sighed one little boy after the day's lunch, "I guess I like green beans—I don't love them, but I like them."

Students try new foods

Two second grade teachers at Washington Elementary School in Huron, who have "team-taught" nutrition in past years, have their own ways of introducing new foods. There are taste-testing teas, in which students must sample each of the six different fruits, and take a turn with the "feely boxes." Feely boxes are covered containers with openings just large enough for a small hand to reach in and feel the mysterious object inside.

Such a project was underway one afternoon in the nutrition class, and the "feely box" had made its first pass through the small group of youngsters. One little girl announced that the object inside must be a pineapple, and she said it with such authority, all other participants quickly agreed. Everyone—particularly the teacher—was surprised when

the cover was removed and out came a prune!

The group was somewhat embarrassed at having confused two such dissimilar items, but not nearly as embarrassed as some parents have been at some things the Foodella project has revealed.

Parents learn too

"The workbook was constructed so the pages could be torn out as completed," explains Ms. Hoffman. "We wanted it like this so the kids would take them home and teach their parents something about nutrition."

But one teacher asked students to keep their workbooks intact for the open house for parents. As the parents were flipping through their children's copies, one father asked—loud enough for the rest of the group to hear—why his youngster hadn't completed the assignment devoted to breakfast.

"The children were told to color what they had eaten for breakfast," the teacher responded. "If they hadn't had any breakfast, they weren't supposed to do anything."

The red-faced father wasn't the only parent looking at a blank breakfast page.

So Foodella has some value for

parents, too. Carol Ketterling's second grade class at Bucannan Elementary School in Huron even made parents part of a nutrition education lesson on snacking.

"The kids planned a menu featuring apple cider and gingerbread, and got the cafeteria staff to prepare it," Ms. Ketterling recalls. "About 90 people, including the students, were in attendance that afternoon. And several parents made a point of telling me about their children's changed eating habits."

Obviously, one workbook about nutrition isn't enough to turn a child away from "junk food" permanently. But Foodella is a good start in that direction.

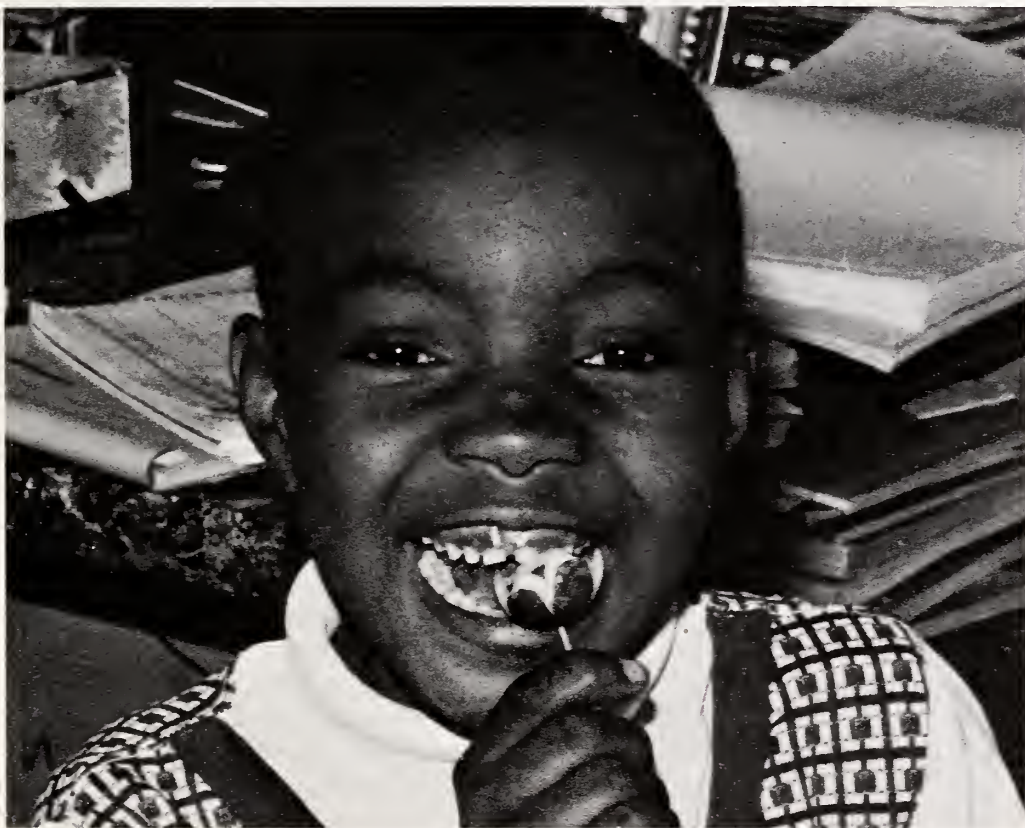
Teachers who didn't even participate in the pilot project have asked Ms. Hoffman if their classes could use the workbook this year. And, in fact, every second grader in the State will be receiving a copy of the workbook.

If nothing else, Foodella has started the whole State thinking about the importance of nutrition education. Teachers have found that it isn't such a boring subject, and students have found that all of us—including elephants—need to be conscious of what we eat.

The school food service staff in Gulfport, Mississippi, set up a nutrition education program that offers classroom lessons and treats from the cafeteria.

There are murmurs of recognition when she wheels her cart, laden with fresh fruits and vegetables, past open classroom doors. The murmurs become exclamations of delight when she makes her dramatic entrance into a room.

She's Nurse Margie Newman—or, as she's sometimes called, "the vegetable lady." And she visits first, second and third grade classrooms in Gulfport, Mississippi, giving children a real taste of what good nutrition is all about.



Radishes were among the vegetables youngsters enjoyed in a tasting party in Gulfport.

As nurse for the city's Follow Through Program—a continuation of the preschool Head Start Program—Ms. Newman has taught short classes on nutrition for several years. This year, however, she's also employed by Gulfport's school food service department, so her nutrition education work now includes visiting regular classrooms, too.

"I'd been observing Ms. Newman's nutrition classes, and thought other children should benefit from them," said Hazel Smith, who is largely responsible for the program's expansion. Ms. Smith has been director of Gulfport's school food service department for 29 years and administers school lunch and breakfast programs.

This year's nutrition education program touches on three different topics: the nutrients provided by fruits and vegetables, the importance of breakfast, and the sources of protein. During each lesson, food samples from the school cafeteria make food facts a lot more palatable.

For instance, when Nurse Newman teaches a class on fruits and vegetables, the school's cafeteria manager prepares an elaborate tray of fresh produce for the children to taste.

At the beginning of the class, the children march around the room to music, carrying pictures of fruits and vegetables. Then Ms. Newman explains what each food does for the body and gives the children bite-size samples to taste.

"When habits are formed," she noted, "they're hard to break. You can't ever start too soon to teach children to eat the right foods."

Does the program work?

"I've had mothers tell me that children were loading their shopping carts with fruits and vegetables because Nurse Newman told them these foods could provide important vitamins and minerals," Ms. Smith said. And that just shows what can happen when you give children a little food for thought. ☆

Kids like having more lunch choices

To the cafeteria staffs at these school districts, adding more lunch selections sounded like a lot more work—at first. Now, they're as enthusiastic as the students.

By Ronald Rhodes

New system offers seven selections

With the opening of school last September, high school students in Mayfield and Las Cruces, New Mexico were met with a new and innovative lunch program. Instead of a standard menu, they had seven choices—many served for the first time in the Las Cruces lunch program. Low participation in the two schools had been the main incentive for change.

"We were determined to come

up with a better program—one that would appeal to high school students," said district food service director Bill Twitty. Having read of such a program being used in Las Vegas, Nevada public schools, he decided to give it a try in his own school system. Now, entrees include tacos, hamburgers, cheeseburgers, pizza, chef's salad, roast beef, and ham and cheese.

Although lunches are similar to purchases students might make at local commercial eating establishments, they all meet requirements for meals served under the National School Lunch Program. For instance, the deluxe cheeseburger contains lettuce, tomatoes, pickles, and onions, and the students have a choice of either french fries or cole slaw.

Containers and utensils for meals are all "throw-away," and the students at Mayfield can take their lunches out under the trees to eat.

Saves staff time

Cafeteria managers Mary Scarborough and Kathy Ward were a bit skeptical about the idea at first, but now enthusiastically back the plan.

"A lot of the backbreaking work has been eliminated with the new plan," said Ms. Scarborough, "since we don't have to prepare large quantities of different cooked vegetables."

Preparing seven menu selections instead of one has not necessitated increasing the size of the food service staff. And the plan has been adapted differently in each of the cafeterias.

Mayfield kitchen staff members each take a specific item to prepare. "They like having the same duty each day," said Ms. Ward, "and some are increasing their efficiency and decreasing preparation time." At Las Cruces High, where there is less kitchen space, the staff uses an assembly line approach.

Food waste is minimal. "After a few days, we learned to predict almost precisely the amount of each item we would be serving," said the food service director.

"Students throw little away."

Results seen in cafeteria

The new approach to school lunch has even made a difference in student behavior, according to R.W. Van Pelt, principal at Mayfield. Although discipline has never been much of a problem, he said the cafeteria is quieter and more orderly with the new food servings system.

Principal Van Pelt admits to some problems with trash on the school campus, but says it is no worse than last year when commercial vendors did a big business selling ice cream and other snack items at curbside.

But the success of any venture depends on the customer—in this case, the student. "The food is really good," pointed out one high school youngster. "Last year they just sort of slopped it on your plate, but this year, we can choose what we want to eat."

Choice line proves popular

Adding more choices to the serving line and getting students involved in the food service has doubled lunch participation at Rock Springs High School in Rock Springs, Wyoming.

Food service director Shirley Roberts and her staff had been looking for new ways to increase student participation and had been visiting other schools to get ideas. They realized that one of the suggestions—a choice line—would be a good compromise to an earlier student request for a la carte service.

Ms. Roberts picked a student committee to help plan menus and suggest additional ideas to boost interest in the cafeteria. The committee developed a 2-week menu cycle, and the plan went into operation. The student committee still functions, keeping meals in tune with the current food interests of the youngsters.

"Sure we serve lots of hamburgers and tacos," says Ms. Roberts, "but kids like those

foods. I feel that eating a nutritionally adequate meal, including hamburger, is far better than eating junk."

From the beginning, the choice line went off without a hitch in the high school. On the first day, Ms. Roberts moved through the lines explaining the choice system to students. Now, menus posted outside the cafeteria help students decide what they want before they reach the serving area. A salad and "Type A lunch in a basket" counter is moved into the dining area just before lunch time, so students wanting salads can get them there.

Same menus for junior highs

Both junior highs now have choice lines, as well. When the White Mountain Junior High opened earlier this year, Principal Jack Norris wanted to get the students off to a good start by offering choices the day school opened. Mr. Norris selected a student committee, and made sure members visited the high school to see the operation there and have lunch. The students began working with Ms. Roberts in planning menus. The food service director now uses the same menus for both junior and senior high school students.

"There is a difference in eating patterns in the two age groups, though," she said. "For instance, we prepare 100 fishwiches for the high school and only 50 for the junior high."

Beginning the choice system at the junior high was also a little different, because the younger students had some trouble deciding what they wanted. But within a few days, the lines were moving as smoothly as in the senior high.

"We encourage students to tell us what they do and do not like about our operation," says Ms. Roberts. "As a result of student comments, we now serve bleu cheese salad dressing twice a week in the high school, and we also have changed from vinegar and oil to creamy Italian dressing."

A change in the junior high

"If you go to a restaurant and have a bad meal, you're not going back for another bad meal. The same applies to the school cafeteria."

Rock Springs food service director

came from students served later in the lunch period complaining that the ketchup bottles were always empty. "We had not taken into consideration just how much ketchup this age group uses," laughed Ms. Roberts.

Students and staff enthusiastic

At first the food service staff was not too sold on the change. They felt they would be involved in a lot of extra work that the students would not even appreciate. But this has not been the case. According to Ms. Roberts, students stop to tell staff members how much they like the choices.

The cafeteria staff tries to keep food quality high, from the standpoint of both taste and eye appeal. Keeping meals colorful is one problem in serving choices, points out the food service director. "I noticed a tray once that was all white. The student had selected every bland-colored dish on the menu. So we now plan the meals carefully to be sure this cannot happen."

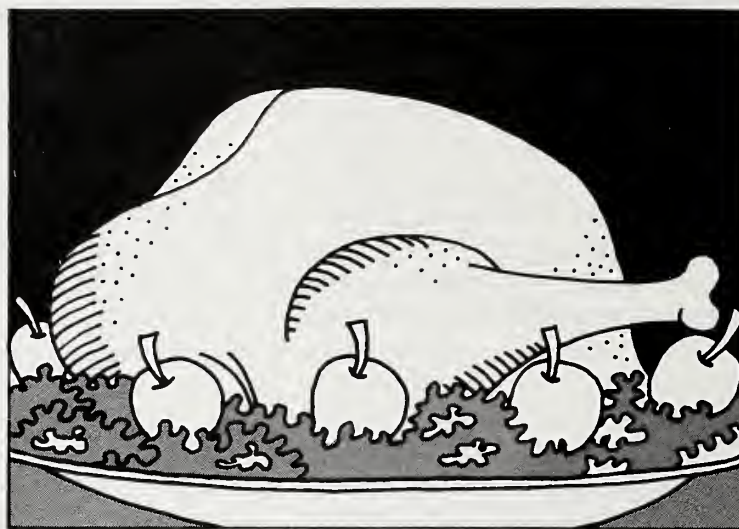
Rock Springs is in the midst of considerable growth, due to the large amount of energy resources in the area. As a result, six new schools opened last school year, and another is on the drawing board. This constant expansion puts a strain on the entire system, including the food service.

"I have a great administration to work with, though," says Ms. Roberts, "and a great staff. Our food service program could never have been a success without the hard work and dedication of my employees."

Above all, Ms. Roberts insists on good food. "If you go to a restaurant and have a bad meal, you're not going back for another bad meal," she said. "The same applies to the school cafeteria." ☆

LUNCHROOM FESTIVITIES

Schools across the country will be planning a variety of holiday activities this month. Here are some of the ways schools make school lunch a part of the festivities.



Turkey with all the "fixin's" is the highlight of the traditional holiday dinner in one community.

About 50 community residents, in addition to quite a few parents, join students at Gardiner Elementary School in Gardiner, Montana, every year for the traditional Christmas dinner.

Alice Lee, Gardiner cafeteria manager, started the event several years ago when she issued a blanket invitation to the community. Now, she explains, people come automatically. "And we're delighted," she says.

Members of civic groups, representatives from the city government, and senior citizens are among the guests for the annual dinner, which features turkey and dressing. Most make their reservations with Ms. Lee well in advance of the meal, but she always prepares "just a little bit more" for unexpected visitors.

And in honor of the occasion, Ms. Lee and her staff do some things to enhance the festive spirit. They buy colorful tablecloths and nice serving bowls to use for the condiment table. The cooks also purchase, out of their own pockets, a special candy treat for each student's tray.

But the mistletoe ball that hangs in the kitchen area draws perhaps the most attention of all, and nearly everyone seems to get in the act—cooks, deliverymen and even the students who help in the cafeteria.

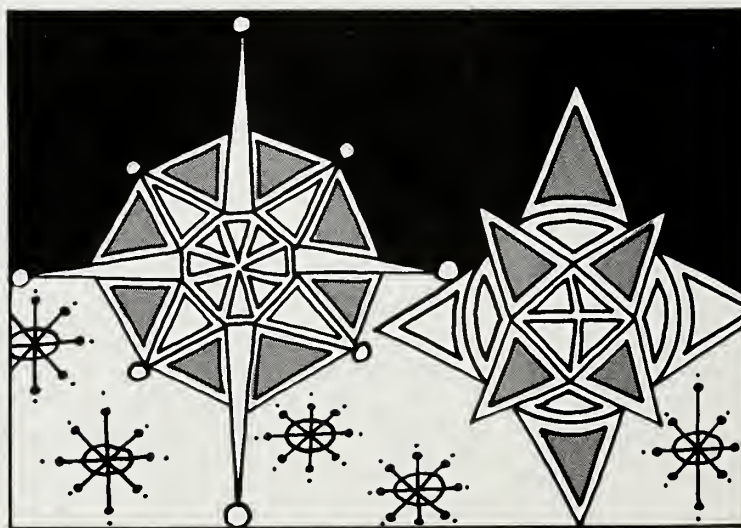


School kitchens and cafeterias take on a festive look with colorful decorations and centerpieces.

In many schools, students and cafeteria staffs make decorating one of the most enjoyable of holiday activities. In Darby, Montana, for example, cooks wear elf and Santa Claus hats to serve Christmas dinner, which usually features a decorated cake. Food service staffs in some Oklahoma schools decorate kitchen utensils and display them on counters so everyone can enjoy them.

North Dakota students make festive centerpieces for school cafeterias, where holiday music adds to the gaiety. The youngsters also decorate Christmas trees with paper cutouts of fruit.

In some Utah schools, students also use a food theme to dress up Christmas trees, but they make their decorations with food cans from home.



Wyoming students learn about nutrition as they decorate Christmas trees for the lunchroom. The cafeteria manager checks each decoration.

Christmas trees become "nutrition trees" in many Wyoming school cafeterias.

"The idea," according to Amelda Little, school lunch consultant for the Wyoming State Department of Education, "originated several years ago from an item published in the 'School Foodservice Journal.' Now it's tradition in a lot of elementary schools in the State."

A tree, purchased by the school district or donated by private citizens, is placed in the cafeteria. And announcements distributed school-wide invite all students to make decorations for a tree with a nutrition theme. Some decorations are made as part of a class project while others are



completed on the students' free time.

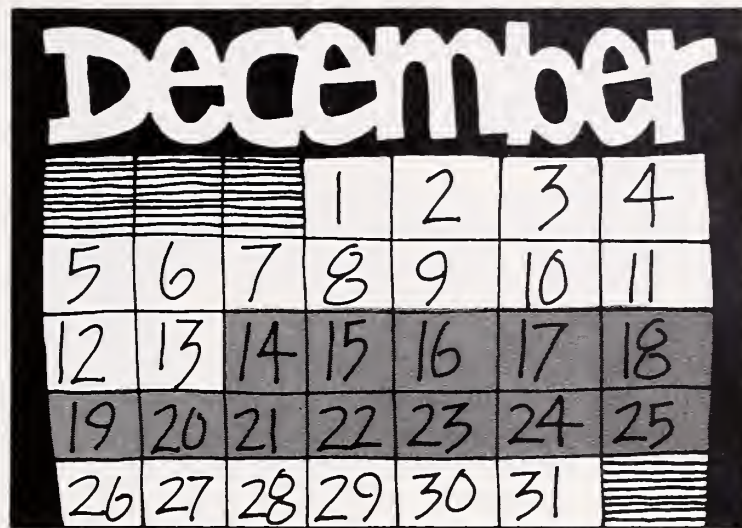
Empty food cans with the labels still intact, fresh fruit and vegetables, and construction paper cutouts are among the materials students use for their decorations. Some of the nonperishable decorations are saved from year to year.

"The students bring each finished product to the cafeteria for the manager to look over," explains Ms. Little, "and if the nutrition theme has been carried out, the decoration is hung on the tree."

All the students enjoy following the progress of the tree, checking every day for new additions. And even the parents make special trips to the cafeteria to see the finished product.

"Twelve Days of Christmas" is the theme of lunchroom activities in South Dakota. Each day features a lesson on a different holiday food.

South Dakota schools last year featured a "Twelve Days of Christmas" series in which a different food item associated with the holiday season was served each day. These foods included cranberries, decorated cookies, pumpkin pie, turkey or ham, plum pudding, fruit cake, sweet potatoes, cornbread, corn, dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy, and citrus salad. Along with the



special food, a poster explaining the history of the food and why it's associated with the Christmas holiday was displayed in the cafeteria. A statement about nutritional benefits was also included.

A Louisiana school celebrates a real Italian Christmas with authentic dishes, live entertainment, and lots of presents from a very special visitor.

Exclamations of "Bon appetito" and "Belissimo" were part of the Christmas festivities at the Holy Ghost School in Hammond, Louisiana, last year.

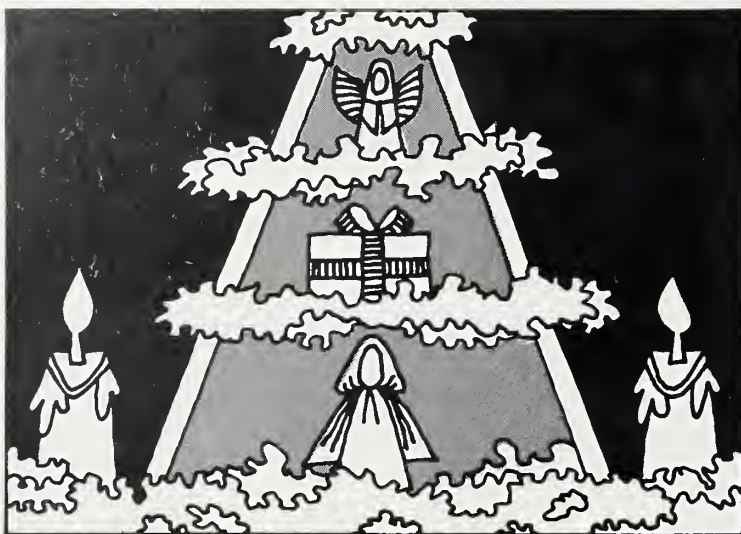
There, for an entire month, authentic Italian food was standard fare in the school cafeteria. And lunch customers claimed the food could compete with any served in the finest restaurants around. Lasagne, chicken rosemary, spaghetti, and veal parmesan were just some of the December treats planned and prepared by cafeteria manager Josey Penzato and her staff.

A real Italian Christmas

They had wanted students and faculty to enjoy a real Italian Christmas, and they went all out. In addition to making the special meals, they filled the cafeteria with colorful decorations and provided live entertainment.

"We have honored other nationalities with similar celebrations in the past," explains Ms. Penzato, who is intent on involving the school lunch program in classroom activities. "But we realized





we had never done anything for Italy. And, after all, about 90 percent of the people in Hammond are of Italian descent."

Most members of the cafeteria staff are also Italian, so they especially enjoyed preparing for the Christmas celebration. They spent hours doing research, making visits to the library and to homes of community members.

"Naturally, we all wanted this to be fun for everyone," says Ms. Penzato. "But we also wanted it to be educational. So, authenticity was essential."

Results were obvious

Food, of course, was a primary concern. To insure authentic results, the staff brought many seasonings from home, or purchased them at the Farmer's Market in New Orleans. They prepared everything from scratch—ricotta cheese from milk, bread crumbs from leftover bread, and sauces from real olive oil. All this hard work was worth it, according to the chefs. The meals were indeed authentic, and the enthusiastic reaction of the students was obvious to the proud staff.

"Before the Christmas celebration started," says Ms. Penzato, "we rarely served Italian food. But the kids have enjoyed this so much, we'll serve more of it in the future."

One indication of the students' approval was the obvious decrease in plate waste. Mothers who



volunteer regularly to help with cleaning dishes pointed out that students ate more than ever.

Decorations and entertainment, too

Decorations were also a big part of the project. The staff put in extra hours preparing the traditional bread wreaths and ornaments. These lined the walls and filled an antique bread peddler's cart Ms. Penzato had located in the community. And, in the center of the cafeteria stood a wooden Christmas tree, like the ones all Italian homes once used instead of live trees.

As with all of Ms. Penzato's heritage celebrations, entertainment involved everyone. For instance, a group of volunteer musicians from the community provided music and songs for the diners. The group included an elderly priest who played a pretty mean mandolin, and each offering drew a round of applause and shouts of "Belissimo!"

Students, themselves, performed traditional songs and skits in Italian. Most kindergarten through third grade students at Holy Ghost participate in the school's Italian language classes.

A special visitor

A homeroom mother even got into the act by



playing the part of La Bafana, a character in Italian Christmas lore who takes the place of Santa Claus.

As the children ate lunch, La Bafana handed out 200 gifts, which Ms. Penzato had individually wrapped the night before. Dressed in the traditional cleaning woman's attire and carrying a burlap bag filled with presents, La Bafana held the students spellbound as they tried to figure out who she was.

They never did.

Christmas is a special time for many of us. But for students and faculty at Holy Ghost, last year's celebration was one they will always remember.

For some, it was their first exposure to an authentic Italian Christmas celebration. For others, it was a recap of traditions that are annually performed in their own homes.

But for everyone, thanks to the efforts of Ms. Penzato and her staff, it was a chance to take a nostalgic look at a proud heritage. ☆

Video speeds certification

Filmed instructions reduce waiting time for food stamp applicants.

There is this place in Virginia that doesn't have the slightest resemblance to New York City or Boston or any other U.S. city, for that matter.

The place is Chesapeake City and its charter says, sure enough, Chesapeake is a bona fide city.

But this city has a swamp that takes up about one-third of the area, or about 100 square miles. It also has three of the country's four species of poisonous snakes slithering around in the city limits. And, to top it off, the local police think nothing of getting a call that there's been an accident because some bear decides to walk in front of a car.

With all this Daniel Boone-type activity, some people are surprised to learn that this city is using some of the most modern technology around to help food stamp recipients.

Video speeds certification

The Chesapeake Social Services Bureau has developed a way to use video tape to provide instructions to groups of food stamp applicants. While applicants wait to see the certification workers, a 45-minute television show describes application procedures and the kinds of documentation that will be required.

W. D. Clark, the director of the Social Services Bureau, and L. C. Vaughan, the bureau's food stamp supervisor, speak highly of the video tape equipment and how it has helped the people of Chesapeake City.

"The primary asset of the tape is that it provides much better service for our clients," said Mr. Clark. "They spend less time with our certification workers, and, of course, this means we are able to handle more people."

Mr. Clark said his agency first used video tape during the winter of 1974, and the staff quickly noticed the difference it made.

"It used to take us about an

hour to process one application," Mr. Vaughan recalled. "When we started using the TV, we cut that time in half."

During January of this year, the city's 7 certification workers saw an average of 58 potential recipients a day. Mr. Vaughan estimated that 80 per day would be about the agency's maximum.

Latest figures put the city's food stamp caseload at more than 2,200 families with a total monthly issuance of about \$220,000.

It sounds like a video tape production would have put a nice dent in the bureau's budget and man-hours—what with film crews and lighting and scripts and everything else.

"Actually, the costs were minimal," said Mr. Vaughan. "We had the video equipment, and when our caseload began to soar, we decided to put it to use."

The actual filming took about 2 hours. The bureau's accountant was the film crew, and one of the agency's service workers did double duty as both script-writer and actor. Mr. Vaughan was the other member of the cast, filling in as the pointer while the service worker went through the application.

Provides uniform instructions

According to the food stamp supervisor, one of the main features of the television film operation is that people receive a uniform set of instructions on filling out the application.

"No matter how closely a person follows a script, if he gives instructions several times, there will be differences in what one group hears as opposed to what another hears," he said. "The differences may be minor, but with the taped presentation, we're sure that everyone is getting the exact instructions."

The food stamp staff requires potential recipients to see the film every time they come in

for certification.

"We do this for two reasons," Mr. Vaughan explained. "First, for those who have seen the tape before, it serves to refresh their memories about what is required in the various parts of the application. Secondly, it gives the people time to prepare their applications before seeing the certification workers."

Shown several times

When large numbers of people come for certification, particularly at the beginning of each month, the tape is shown several times. Viewers watch the film in a small room adjacent to the rather unique waiting room. The Chesapeake Social Services Bureau has its offices in a former elementary school, and the food stamp division is mainly located in the auditorium. Caseworkers' desks are behind the closed-curtain stage, and applicants wait in the rows of seats.

"While one group of applicants watches the tape, another group is being processed by the certification workers," Mr. Vaughan said. "it creates a steady flow of work for us, and it also gives applicants something to do instead of sitting around."

The process has not gone unnoticed by those seeking help.

"I was told that getting on the food stamp program would be a lot of trouble," said one client, who was applying for food stamps for the first time. "But the lady on the television did a good job of explaining what was needed on the forms, and I didn't have any problems."

Another person who has been receiving stamps for some time said she didn't mind the repetition of watching the TV tape.

"Oh, I've seen it lots of times," she said, "But I still watch it because there always seems to be some part of the application that I'm not too sure about." ☆

Markets on wheels

Different circumstances have made food shopping difficult for Indian people in Nevada and the elderly in Boston. But both groups are now getting help from similar community projects--mobile markets that make regularly scheduled visits.

*By Benedicto Montoya
and Catherine Tim Jensen*



“Groceries and nutrition education”

The Nevada Inter-Tribal’s GANE Mobile serves low-income Indian families who live on remote reservations and have to travel long distances to shop.

Yomba is a small Indian reservation in central Nevada, population about 80. For a long time, residents have had to travel 30 miles to the nearest store and 110 miles to the nearest supermarket. But now, twice a month, a well-stocked store is as near as the council hall. And it’s filled with reasonably-priced foods.

The store is actually a mobile grocery store, operated by the Nevada Inter-Tribal Council (ITC). Traveling between 10 small reservations in Nevada, the store is ITC’s solution to providing remote, low-income Indian households with a convenient place to shop for foods they need and want at reasonable prices. The store is authorized to accept food stamps.

Getting the project started

ITC’s research analyst, Shayne Del Cohen, first began looking into the possibility of establishing a mobile grocery store 2 years ago. Last September, they received a grant from the Community Services Administration for preliminary planning and

research on the project. In April, ITC made the final decision to put the store on the road, and engaged the consulting services of Interaction, Inc., of Seattle to develop plans. They obtained and refitted a used 40-foot trailer, and in less than 2 months the mobile store was ready to go.

Late in June the store rolled into the small Indian community of Pyramid Lake. On hand to see what it was all about was a skeptical group of local residents. “I’m sure they didn’t know what to expect,” said Sonja Young, director of ITC’s Community Food and Nutrition Program. “We had given them little warning that the store was coming. Yet, a good sized crowd was waiting. We did about \$300 worth of business that day and that was from people who had just come to take a look.”

On its initial run to nine reservations, the mobile store cash register rang up \$2,500 worth of business. And while ITC is pleased with the response to the store, council members feel that there is a lot more riding on the 40-foot trailer than just groceries.

Groceries and nutrition education

As director of ITC’s food and nutrition programs, Ms. Young is extremely interested in improving the nutritional habits of Nevada Indians. And the registered dietician says the mobile store fits right into these plans. In fact, the store has been named the GANE Mobile, which stands for Groceries and Nutrition Education.

Ms. Young explained that the full impact of what she “could do nutritionally” hit her as she was trying to decide how to stock the GANE Mobile.

“All of a sudden it dawned on me,” she said, “that when I said ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to a food item, or made a decision what to charge for it, I was saying what the diets of the people would be.”

Armed with these potent weapons of supply and price, Ms. Young hopes to “educate”

her mobile store customers on how to use their food stamps and other food monies to improve their diets. While most of the 800 food items carried by the mobile store will reflect Reno supermarket prices, the markup will be as low as possible on fruits and vegetables, and on foods that diabetics and others on special diets require. Eventually, Ms. Young will put signs in the store urging customers to make wise food choices.

Help for food stamp applicants

The mobile store customers will also benefit from the work of eight nutrition aides hired by the director of the Community Food and Nutrition Program. Funded by the Concentrated Employment Training Act (CETA), these aides will advise people how to plan a nutritional diet and use their food monies wisely. The aides will also provide assistance with food stamp applications.

"For example," said Ms. Young, "there are many elderly people who have English language difficulties. The nutrition aides will explain the Food Stamp Program to these people and help them apply."

In addition to the nutrition aides, representatives from the Nevada Welfare Division are also making special efforts to meet the needs of the Indians.

Division staff members make weekly visits to the reservations to certify eligible applicants and conduct group sessions explaining the program and answer any questions potential participants may have.

"Each time the GANE Mobile visits," said Ms. Young, "it will be like one big food day. The store will be there for people to shop and place orders for the next trip. And the nutrition aides and State representatives will be on hand to give advice on nutrition and help with food stamp applications."

Staff sees other benefits

While making the Food Stamp Program work for the low-income people who live on these isolated reservations is the primary purpose of the GANE Mobile, the ITC also sees it as a way to spark economic activity of benefit to Nevada Indians.

"They grow vegetables on the Moapa Reservation in southern Nevada," Ms. Young said.

"We hope the GANE Mobile will eventually provide an outlet for those vegetables. There is also a meat packing plant on the Walker Reservation, and the mobile store has the capability to carry fresh meats.

"What we hope to do is circulate Indian money within the Indian community," she added. "This will provide incentive to begin business and will lead to jobs for Indian people."

The GANE Mobile is not intended to be a financial success for the ITC. Ms. Young explained that the tractor-trailer operation will probably require financial aid from other sources for some time. She admits that all the hopes they've pinned on the mobile grocery store are dependent upon a lot of factors which tend to make it a "long shot."

"But," says Ms. Young, "it's one that could prove a winner for Indian people."

A converted bookmobile

Boston's mobile market is designed to aid elderly people who have trouble shopping because of physical handicaps, failing eyesight, or other problems.

For many older residents of Boston, the old fashioned "corner store" has returned—but now it's parked in the middle of the block. The convenient little grocery store is a 31-foot green van, which rolls into 30 locations in Boston each week to serve senior citizens.

The mobile market is designed to help those who, due to physical handicaps and other problems, find shopping at regular food markets difficult.

The van is a converted bookmobile where detective stories and children's picture books have been replaced by shelves of soups, cereals, and canned goods. Fresh milk, meat, fruits, and vegetables are also available, and there is a freezer unit stocked with TV dinners, frozen juice and ice cream. The store carries a total of 300 items, and accepts cash or food stamps.

Appeals to elderly shoppers

Any Boston citizen over 60 may shop at the mobile market at any of its stops. Shoppers get help with selections from manager Al Legros, a veteran of years of food service management in the private sector. Mr. Legros and two other employees, a driver and a checker, take time to help find things for cus-

tomers with failing eyesight, and to assist them up and down the two steps of the van. The manager points out that customers like the small size of the van and feel safer than they do in some of the larger stores.

"Older folks are afraid on the streets and in crowded stores today," says Mr. Legros. "Many have told me about having their wallets, purses, and even their groceries snatched."

Each morning, Mr. Legros stocks the van at a supermarket chain store just outside of Boston. At the same time, he puts extra supplies in his car, and then follows the van to each location, ready to restock or go for replacements when there is a run on a special item or perishable.

No markup on items

All stock is purchased at shelf price from the supermarket. Mobile market prices are the same as those at the supermarket—even for advertised specials. There is no overhead markup on any item.

The mobile market concept was developed by the staff of Boston Mayor, Kevin White, with advice from senior citizen

groups and the consumer council, and technical assistance from the grocery industry. In Boston, two supermarket chains were already operating bus service to grocery stores for senior citizens. The mobile market was an additional service, particularly helpful to those who could not manage the size and crowds of a regular supermarket.

A cooperative effort

The mobile market first rolled down the streets of Boston in October 1975. Today, the route and clientele are well established. Originally, the market served more locations and made stops only every 2 weeks. The first locations chosen were Boston Housing Authority sites for the elderly. Some have been dropped because adequate supermarkets nearby minimized demand, but stops at several private dwellings for the elderly have been added. During its first weeks, flyers and radio publicity spread the word about the service.

The vehicle was rebuilt at a cost of \$18,000 provided through a Community Development and Revenue Sharing bloc grant. This covered mechanical and body work and installation of a special generator for refrigeration. The van is still the property of the Department of Parks, which pays gas and garage expenses. Three employees are paid through CETA funds (Comprehensive Employment Training Act) and the Boston Housing Authority provides a security guard.

Boston's supermarket on wheels serves approximately 500 older Bostonians each week. According to Mr. Legros, it helps them maintain their independence, which is important.

"Before the market came by, they often had to ask relatives to shop for them," he notes. "They tell me they like to pick out their own food, and being in the store reminds them of food items they might forget."

Mr. Legros and his customers are proof that their urge for self-sufficiency is undiminished.☆

Strict accountability is an important part of this mobile sales operation.

Milwaukee County welfare department is trying something different to maintain service to food stamp recipients and to improve the security of its sales operation. On December 1, 1975, they contracted with a private security firm—Brinks, Inc.—to sell food stamps at 17 locations throughout the county.

The county had already been operating these sales points in an effort to make it easier for the needy eligible to participate in the program. The sites were in areas of greatest need—in places like highrise apartment buildings for the elderly and in neighborhoods with high percentages of food stamp users. Everyone agreed the service was valuable, and the recipients were enthusiastic.

But the county found that, as desirable as it was, the service was tying up its staff. John Molzen, food stamp program supervisor for Milwaukee County explained: "We always had a crunch at the beginning of the month, when welfare checks and authorization-to-purchase cards were issued. Those first days of the month were our busiest, yet we had to get out and reach the people in the neighborhoods. We were selling 7 days each month, using two teams with a teller and a deputy sheriff."

Looking for a way to continue the operation, last fall the county decided to approach Brinks. After a series of meetings, they reached an agreement, and by the beginning of December, the security firm was ready to take over the mobile sales operation at all 17 sites.

"When Brinks took over, it allowed our staff to concentrate



Security firm brings food stamps to needy neighborhoods

By Russell Forte

on administrative work and sell stamps from the main county office," Mr. Molzen said. "At the same time, it released the deputies to do their work."

Helps county and recipients

The food stamp supervisor noted some other advantages. For one, Brinks has been able to bring the sales days up closer to the beginning of the month. "We had difficulty doing this with our other commitments and limited manpower,"

Mr. Molzen said. Another big advantage has been added security—the firm uses three armed guards at each location.

According to Brinks representative Mel Anderson, increased security is one of the features people like best about the new arrangement. "For example, managers at the highrise for the elderly seemed more relaxed when they learned Brinks would be handling sales," he pointed out. "And the presence of armed guards gives recipients a feeling of security, and somehow that helps speed up the selling process. The sales lines move fast, and the whole operation is efficient and orderly."

Visitors watching the sales at one location were impressed with this efficiency. As usual, the county welfare office had published advance notice of sales points and hours of business. The Brinks armored truck pulled up minutes before the scheduled starting time, and, while two guards waited in the truck, a third went in and inspected the site—a clean, finished basement in a public building. When he was satisfied that it was secure, he returned to the truck for his colleagues and

stood guard while they brought in a supply of money and stamps.

Within minutes, they had set up their cash and food stamp boxes. One guard stood watch while another opened the doors for food stamp recipients to come in. Some 200 people moved through the line in the 90 minutes they were in business.

When they had completed the sales, the Brinks staff packed up and moved to the next location. That day, the team sold at two other locations before returning to the main Brinks office where they reconciled the stamps and money against authorization-to-purchase cards taken in, and put all money and stamps in the vault.

Brinks has three crews working the territory, selling 7 days out of the month. The number of people buying stamps varies from site to site—from as few as 56 at the smallest to 716 at the largest, which gets three visits each month. In total, the firm sells to about 3,000 of the 21,000 food stamp households in Milwaukee County.

Various services involved

When Brinks took on the job, which the firm views partly as a community service, representatives worked closely with the county to learn accountability procedures and other facets of the program.

Brinks also stores the county's supply of food stamps under a separate contract with USDA, so the company carries two inventories—one for bulk storage, and one for sales. Brinks keeps a continuous inventory of the supply, and it reports to the county the amounts and serial numbers of all food stamps in

stock. Food stamp shipments go directly to Brinks, according to arrangements with the county and USDA. The county gets a notice of every shipment sent from American Bank Note, the principal printer of food stamps, so the local food stamp staff knows exactly how many stamps will be in each delivery.

Controls are tight

According to John Molzen, every step includes detailed reporting procedures that assure strict accountability. "For example, on all sales days we get daily cashier reports from Brinks," the food stamp supervisor said. "The report carries a record of the stamps each teller started with at the beginning of the day, plus the teller's total stamps after the sales."

"This report also carries the number of authorization-to-purchase cards and the amount of cash each teller took in, as well as the number of stamps he issued."

Brinks makes its own deposits to the bank using FNS certificate of deposit form, FNS-282, just as the county does in its own issuance operation. Both Brinks and the bank then send the county a deposit slip, as a double check.

Careful coordination has been essential from the start of the mobile sales operation. And arranging the transfer to Brinks required some special steps—like getting approval from the county board and talking with recipients and site managers.

But according to Milwaukee County officials, the effort was worth it. It's resulted in efficient and continuous service that's helping the county's neediest food stamp recipients. ☆

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